



NAVY HISTORY MATTERS

June 9, 2020



Compiled by Brent Hunt, Naval History and Heritage Command's Communication and Outreach Division

Welcome to Navy History Matters—our weekly compilation of articles, commentaries, and blogs related to history and heritage. Every week we'll gather the top-interest items from a variety of media and social media sources and then link you to related content at NHHC's website (history.navy.mil), your authoritative source for Navy history.

★ Investigating Okinawa: The Story Behind a Kamikaze Pilot's Scarf

In commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the [Battle of Okinawa](#), personnel from NHHC collaborated to share the battle's history through a range of materials and from as many perspectives as possible. Their work led to the identification of a donated kamikaze's scarf (*hachimaki*) fragment not available for public view in one of NHHC's artifact storage facilities. Little information existed about the artifact, but the team worked to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the item. The scarf was accessioned into the command's collection on May 14, 1997, by the National Association of USS LCS(L) 1-130 and/or the L. Richard Rhame collection. The donor believed the stain on the fabric was human blood. The only other information that was associated with the artifact was that it was worn by a Japanese pilot who crashed near USS LCS-112 in the area of Buckner Bay, Okinawa. For more on the investigation, read [Investigating Okinawa: The Story Behind a Kamikaze Pilot's Scarf](#) at [NHHC's website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/world-war-ii/1945/battle-of-okinawa/kamikaze-pilot-scarf.html>

★ The Importance of Getting Navy Artifacts to the Public

The [World War II](#) ensign from [USS Reno](#) was highlighted in the [news](#) recently when it was taken from its display case at the City Hall in Reno, NV. Fortunately, the flag mysteriously reappeared with an anonymous handwritten note stating, "Needed protecting." The 48-star ensign, along with the commissioning pennant and the ship's bell have been on loan to the city of Reno from NHHC since 1976 (bell) and 1987 (ensign and pennant). "Specifically for the citizens of Reno, there is a personal connection to these artifacts from *USS Reno*," said [Curator Branch](#) Head, Jeffrey Bowdoin. "Historically, the citizens from the cities and states of the namesake ships hold tremendous pride in these ships and their crews, with many community members forming long-lasting ties between the ship and community." For more, [read the blog](#) by MC2 Mutis Capizzi at [The Sextant](#).



Photo Link: <https://usnhistory.navylive.dodlive.mil/2020/06/04/the-importance-of-getting-navy-artifacts-to-the-public/>

★ The Fascinating History of WWII Carrier *Lake Champlain*

June 3 marked the 75th anniversary of the commissioning of the aircraft carrier [USS Lake Champlain](#). The ship was one of three carriers built during [World War II](#) at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, which is now a facility dedicated to maintenance and modernization. *Lake Champlain* was completed a few months before the [war ended](#) but did not participate in any of those battles; however, the ship provided vital support during the [Cuban Missile Crisis](#) and served as the primary recovery ship for America's first manned [flight into space](#). In just two decades of service, the ship, nicknamed "the straightest and greatest," was redesignated twice, steamed around the world, and participated in some of the most pivotal engagements of the [Cold War](#). For more, [read the blog](#) by Michael Brayshaw at [The Sextant](#).



Photo Link: <https://usnhistory.navylive.dodlive.mil/2020/06/03/great-lake-the-fascinating-history-of-nnsys-world-war-ii-aircraft-carrier-uss-lake-champlain/>

★ WWII@75: Richard M. McCool

On June 11, 1945, while operating off the Ryukyu Chain, Japan, Lt. [Richard M. McCool](#) led his vessel in the rescue of survivors onboard [USS William D. Porter](#) after a Japanese kamikaze bomb exploded underneath the ship. The next evening, two more Japanese kamikazes attacked. Organizing a counterattack, McCool's crew downed one of the kamikazes and damaged the second before it crashed into the vessel. McCool was severely wounded, suffering severe burns from the attacks. For his "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty," McCool received the [Medal of Honor](#). The future USS *Richard M. McCool Jr.* is named in honor of this [World War II](#) hero.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/middle-east/operation-iraqi-freedom.html>

★ Commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic, Commemorates the 78th Anniversary of the Battle of Midway

Just six months after the [Pearl Harbor attack](#), the U.S. Navy was engaged in one of the most significant air-sea battles of [World War II](#). To commemorate the [Battle of Midway](#) that took place 78 years ago, Rear Adm. [John F. Meier](#), Commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic, honored the dedication and service of those who participated during a live-stream ceremony at the Naval Aviation Memorial Park in Virginia Beach, June 4. "The Battle of Midway represents the finest attributes of our Navy ethos of honor, courage, and commitment and what must never be lost is the memory of those who have served and those who serve today as no matter the pace of technology, no matter the complexity of the machines, our Navy will continue to rely on our nation's most precious resource, that being her sons and daughters," Meier said. For more, [read the U.S. Navy release](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.navy.mil/media/dvids/image/200604-N-LV363-1010.jpg>

★ Guam Provides Relief for Earthquake Victims—50 Years Ago

On June 12, 1970, after a 7.9 magnitude earthquake hit Peru killing upwards of 70,000 people and leaving more than half a million people injured or homeless, [USS Guam](#) began 11 days of relief flights to transport medical teams and supplies, and to rescue victims. The ship was equipped with three surgical teams, 50 hospital corpsman, three operating rooms, and 1,000 hospital beds. During the operation, *Guam* transported more than 1,500 passengers and nearly 200 tons of relief supplies to and from devastated areas. Most of the sorties were flown in a hazardous environment, due to the unusually high altitudes, rugged mountain terrain, and dust-filled basins. "The people were frightened and confused at first, at being flown aboard a helicopter," said Hospital Corpsman Nicholas Aluotto, "but early arrivals helped us get newcomers more relaxed. As many regained strength, they tried to help out in any way they could. Some offered to clean the ship."



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/Other/K-116329.html>

★ Firebolt Commissioned

On June 10, 1995, 25 years ago, [USS Firebolt](#) was commissioned at Alexandria, VA. It is the first U.S. Navy ship named *Firebolt*. In January 2004, a crew from [USS Thunderbolt](#) assumed custody of *Firebolt*, marking the third such crew to operate the patrol craft during [Operation Iraqi Freedom](#) in an effort to maintain her in theater. The ship primarily conducted maritime interception operations in the North Arabian Gulf. On April 25, 2004, *Firebolt* lowered a rigid hull inflatable boat manned by seven Sailors to [investigate a suspicious dhow](#). As the Sailors approached the boat and began to board, it suddenly exploded, killing three of the Sailors. The other four Sailors were seriously wounded but survived the terrorist attack. On April 29, 2005, as part of a multinational force, the crew of *Firebolt* rescued 89 people from a dhow that had capsized in the Gulf of Aden off the Somali coast.



Photo Link: <https://www.navy.mil/management/photodb/photos/050429-N-5526M-028.jpg>

★ Dunkirk and the Little Ships

In a recent [naval history podcast](#) from Preble Hall, Dr. Philip Weir, naval historian and author, discusses his forthcoming book *Dunkirk and the Little Ships*, about the evacuation of Allied forces from Dunkirk in 1940. The [Preble Hall podcast](#), conducted by personnel at USNA in Annapolis, MD, interviews historians, practitioners, military personnel, and other experts on a variety of naval history topics from ancient history to more current events. Also loaded recently is the [three-part podcast](#) of the museum-hosted NavyCon 2020. This year's theme was "Navies, Science Fiction, and Great Power Competition."

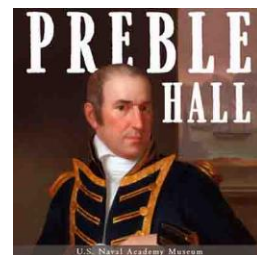


Photo Link: <https://www.usna.edu/Museum/PrebleHall/>

★ U.S. Army Birthday, Flag Day—June 14

More than a year before the Declaration of Independence, the Continental Congress passed two resolutions—the birth of the American Continental Army and adoption of the flag of the United States. Founded on June 14, 1775, with Gen. George Washington as the first commander-in-chief, the [U.S. Army](#) became [America's first national institution](#) and has played a vital role in the growth and development of the United States. Over the course of the [U.S. Army's storied history](#), major battles in defense of our country have been decisive, including the Battle of Yorktown, Battle of Vicksburg, Meuse-Argonne Offensive, [Operation Overlord](#), and the Battle of the Bulge. Happy birthday to our brothers and sisters in arms, and let the Stars and Stripes be forever a symbol of liberty and freedom.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-115000/NH-115310.html>

★ Webpage of the Week

This week's Webpage of the Week is new to the [Battle of Okinawa](#) webpage. "[Closer Than Brothers](#)": [The Loss of USS *Twiggs* at Okinawa](#) tells the story of the ship's ordeal with kamikaze attacks, June 16, 1945. While in the western support area, a low-flying enemy aircraft dropped a torpedo, striking *Twiggs* on her port side and blowing up her number 2 magazine. The kamikaze quickly circled the destroyer before smashing into the ship, causing further damage and intense fires to break out. The ship's commanding officer, Cmdr. George Philip Jr., was mortally wounded. In total, *Twiggs* lost 153 men in the attack off Senaga Shima, one of just five destroyers to have more than half its crew killed and wounded in suicide attacks during the battle. NHHC historian Guy Nasuti authored the essay.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/80-G-215000/80-G-215535.html>

★ Today in Naval History

On June 9, 1959, [USS *George Washington*](#), the first U.S. Navy nuclear-powered fleet ballistic missile submarine, was christened and launched at Groton, CT. On July 20, 1960, the [submarine](#) made history when she successfully launched the first *Polaris* from a submerged submarine. At 12:39 p.m., *George Washington's* commanding officer sent President Dwight D. Eisenhower the message: "*Polaris* from out of the deep to target. Perfect." Less than two hours later, another missile from the submerged submarine homed in on the impact area 1,100 miles down range. *George Washington's* nuclear capability was removed in 1983, and she was classified as SSN-598, serving until 1985 when she was decommissioned. In 1998, the submarine was processed in the nuclear recycling program at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard.



For more dates in naval history, including your selected span of dates, see [Year at a Glance](#) at [NHHC's website](#). Be sure to check this page regularly, as content is updated frequently.

Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/Other/K-25571.html>